

## Coffee by ohmybgosh

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**Summary:**

Steve and Barb find something in common at Starbucks.

# Coffee

## Author's Note:

- For [PenelopeTweed](#).

Happiest of birthdays babe!! I hope you enjoy this silly little fic that I did indeed write at a Starbucks :)

“And it’s just like, he won’t listen. We all know how good he is, but he refuses to see that, and so he refuses to even apply. It’s just so frustrating, you know?”

She paused, took an angry, tight lipped sip from her green straw.

“Like, he has so much potential. But he won’t even apply and it sucks. Because he’d get in. He would.”

Another angry sip, a cough from the cold. “Barb?”

“Hm?”

“Are you listening?”

“Yes.”

Nancy raised her eyebrows and Barb smiled. “OK, I got the gist.”

Nancy sighed, but her eyes were light, teasing. “I’m not as exciting as the barista.”

Barb turned pink.

“Jonathan won’t apply for the show?” she asked. She sipped her tea and made a point not to look up at the counter, where the woman was, dark hair tied back in a messy bun, something stained across the chest of her green apron, little pumpkins dangling from her ears. It was early September, and the air finally had a cool breeze, which meant the menu at their local Starbucks had changed, and that, subsequently, troves of people filtered in and out to get their seasonal fix of pumpkin spice or maple pecan.

The woman was talking to her coworker, a guy with a bun not quite as messy as hers.

“Ha,” Nancy grinned at her. “Now you’re listening.”

Barb took another delicate sip of tea. Nancy crossed her legs under the table, tiny foot brushing the hem of Barb’s skirt.

“He won’t.” She twirled her green straw around. “He thinks he won’t get in.”

Barb made a “tch” sound.

“That’s what I said!”

“Steve should talk to him. He likes Steve.”

“Steve’s got his own stuff going on. He’s been so secretive about this new guy.”

It was true. Steve had recently stopped accompanying them to Jazz Wednesday’s at the tavern, which had been his idea in the first place. When they hung out or went for drinks on the weekends he dashed off at the end of the evening, even if it was 4AM and they were planning on crashing at Nancy and Jonathan’s. They all knew he was dating someone, because sometimes he checked his phone and got this look like a boiled lobster and he smiled way more than usual. But whenever they brought it up he pretended he couldn’t hear them.

“Maybe he wants to keep it private,” Barb shrugged.

“How so?”

“Just, you know. Have something for himself.”

Nancy looked a bit hurt. “What do you mean?”

“No,” Barb said quickly. “I mean, like, something personal. We spend so much time together.”

“You think he’s, what, trying to get away from us?”

“No, no.” Barb shook her head. She didn’t know how to put it, without hurting Nancy’s feelings, because Nancy’s feelings were a bit sensitive still when it came to Steve. “It’s just, i mean, we do a lot together. We talk about everything, right? Maybe Steve’s just not ready to share this part of his life. Maybe he wants to figure the relationship out first, before he shares it with his friends.”

Nancy frowned. “Could be.”

Barb shrugged again, smiled slightly. “Steve’s weird.”

“Yeah.” Nancy’s mouth tugged at the corner and Barb smiled wider.

A guy with a camera bag slung over his shoulder struggled to open the front door, stumbling through and coming up to the counter to catch the guy with the messy bun, who looked annoyed, tucking a cigarette behind his ear and retying his green apron around his waist. The sight prompted more talk of Jonathan and his low self-esteem, and the conversation carried Nancy and Barb through the end of their drink, and on the way to the door, back out into the crisp cool afternoon.

They left, Nancy leading the way. Barb was unable to resist the urge to glance over her shoulder as she followed Nancy out.

The woman was struggling with the espresso machine, but she looked up when the bell chimed, and there was a second where their eyes met.

The following few days Barb returned to the coffee shop three times, once with their gang sans Steve, who dropped her, Nancy, and Jonathan off at the corner and came up with a half formed excuse of a study date. The second time Nancy and her sat in the comfy leather chairs for several hours, doing homework. And the third time Barb came alone.

This time she brought a book with the intention of reading it, but mostly with the intention of catching a glimpse of the woman, and maybe, *maybe* this time, even work up the courage to say hello to

her. She'd put on her favorite dress, with little foxes on the collar, because Steve fondly referred to it as her sexy librarian dress.

When Barb approached the counter, however, she couldn't see her anywhere, and the thought that perhaps she wasn't in today made Barb feel rather glum.

She'd barely reached the counter when the guy with the bun, who was drizzling caramel sauce over a grande frappacino, looked up and waved his hand at Barb. A little rudely, in her opinion.

"Hey!" he called. "Tea?"

"Um, yes." Barb cleared her throat. "Earl -"

"Got it!"

Barb grimaced.

The guy sprinkled sea salt over the frappacino, brought it to the end of the counter and called out the order. A blushing girl dashed up, giving him a smile and a breathless "thank you" that he didn't seem to notice.

He fixed Barb's tea, behind the counter so she couldn't see.

He brought it right to her, with a cozy and no lid. She looked down and frowned; it was a green tea latte, with a white heart in the center.

Barb looked up at the guy, in disbelief.

"On the house." He had an Iron Maiden shirt on under his apron and his blond hair was coming loose from the knot he kept it in, one thick curl falling in front of sharp blue eyes.

"Sorry?" Barb asked.

"Your drink," the guy said. "On the house."

"I -" Barb started, bewildered. Was he hitting on her? "I appreciate the gesture -"

“No.” The guy shook his head, laughed, a quick, short laugh like a bark. He grinned wide, too wide (too many teeth, Barb thought) and licked his lips. “Not me. Trust me, you’re not my type.”

Barb felt her cheeks going red.

“Thanks,” she said shortly, snatching the tea and marching across the shop, as far from the counter as possible.

She felt the guy watching her but she refused to look at him.

She pulled out her book, staring at the page but unable to really read the words. What a horrid day. She felt her spirits sinking. It had started well, with the weather, her dress, the promise of seeing the barista. Now though, the dress felt foolish and the weather felt cool and unkind. The woman wasn’t even here and that guy had basically told her she was a hag.

The words blurred and Barb blinked angrily.

She was just working herself up to standing to leave, planning on tossing the tea into the trash, when someone cleared their throat.

“Did I get it right?”

Barb looked up, blinked again.

The woman was standing there, little bats hanging from her earlobes this time. She had taken her apron off, was twisting it nervously in her hands. She wore a black turtleneck with dark jeans and red converse and Barb swallowed thickly, unable to speak.

“You always get London Fogs,” the woman explained quickly. “I thought I’d make you a matcha, you know, and it’d be a nice surprise. But I can chuck it, if it’s no good.”

Barb glanced down at the tea, the bright green bubbles and the little white heart.

“I’m sorry,” the woman said in a rush. “I’ll make you your usual, on the house, of course. I just thought -”

“It’s ok,” Barb squeaked, finally finding her voice.

The woman shifted, scuffed a worn red sneaker against the tiles.

“I love matcha,” Barb said breathlessly. She was suddenly desperate to get the woman to stay. “I do. It’s my favorite.”

She took a deliberate sip of her tea to prove it, then regretted it when it burned her tongue. She felt her face reddening even more, if possible.

“You do?”

Barb nodded earnestly. “It’s really good.”

The woman smiled. “I’m sorry I couldn’t make it for you. I was going to, but then there was a bathroom mishap, and well. You know.”

Barb nodded. She didn’t know, but then she wasn’t sure if she wanted.

“Billy said he’d make it for me,” the woman continued.

Barb glanced up at the counter. The guy, Billy, was staring out the wide windows, looking bored at not noticing the girls at the barstools who kept trying to catch his eye.

“He’s, um, interesting,” Barb offered.

The woman snorted. “Yeah. He’s alright, though.”

“I thought he was flirting with me,” Barb admitted.

The woman grinned. “He gets that way sometimes. But don’t worry. He acts like a huge flirt but he’s actually head over heels for this guy.”

Billy suddenly looked over at them, tapping his wrist. “Kal, my break!”

The woman sighed and rolled her eyes at him. She turned back to Barb, twisting her apron nervously once more.

“Hey, I’ve gotta get back to work.” She hesitated, then pulled a slip of paper out of her pocket, crumpled and with the numbers slightly smudged, but still readable. “Um, if you ever want to get a drink sometime. Gimme a call.”

She set the paper on the table and Barb swallowed, afraid her heart was beating loud enough for her to hear it. She nodded, unable to find her voice.

“Cool.” The woman smiled, cheeks pink. “I’ll see you later, then.”

She went to go, then stopped.

“Sorry,” she said. “I’m Kali.”

“Barb,” Barb said weakly.

“Barb,” Kali repeated, and it sounded so sweet in her voice, so delicate and precious like a rare flower. “Nice to meet you.”

She went back around the counter, tying her apron on, and checking Billy with her hip as she passed.

Barb sat stunned for a minute. She picked up the paper and folded it carefully, tucking it into her pocket.

She stood to go, too nervous to sit and read while Kali was there, and also bursting to call Nancy with the news. She gathered her things quickly, taking her tea, and left, with a quick wave to Kali on her way out.

She nearly crashed into someone outside the front door. Her tea splashed a familiar red sweater and she looked up.

“Steve?”

“Hey, Barb,” Steve said, smiling sheepishly like a kid with their hand caught in the cookie jar.

“What’re doing here?”

“Ah. Coffee.” He gestured at the Starbucks sign.



Barb glanced over shoulder. Inside, Billy was taking off his apron, tucking his hair behind his ears and smoothing his hands down his front.

She glanced back at Steve, who rubbed at the tea spill on his chest.

The pieces started to fall into place in her mind and she smiled slowly.

“Coffee,” she repeated. “Right.”